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The Effectiveness of Religious Coping Training in Reducing Academic Stress in New Students

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Abstract:

New students often face high levels of academic stress due to the heavy academic demands in their early college years. Previous studies have discussed stress management strategies, but little attention has been given to the effectiveness of structured religious coping training as a preventive intervention. This study aims to examine whether religious coping training can reduce academic stress in new students. A pre-experimental design was employed, using a modified version of the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) consisting of 51 items as the measurement tool. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and paired sample t-test. The results revealed a significant reduction in academic stress levels after the intervention. The average pretest score was 95.57, which decreased to 69.14 in the posttest, with a mean difference of 26.43. The t-test results confirmed the statistical significance of this decrease (p < 0.05). These findings indicate that religious coping training is effective in helping new students manage academic stress. This study contributes both theoretically, by reinforcing the role of religious coping in stress management, and practically, by offering a structured training model that can be applied in higher education settings.

Keywords: *Training, Religious Coping, Academic Stress*

Abstrak:

Mahasiswa baru sering menghadapi tingkat stres akademik yang tinggi akibat banyaknya tuntutan akademik pada tahun pertama perkuliahan. Beberapa penelitian sebelumnya telah membahas strategi manajemen stres, namun masih sedikit yang menguji efektivitas pelatihan koping religius secara terstruktur sebagai intervensi preventif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji apakah pelatihan koping religius dapat menurunkan stres akademik pada mahasiswa baru. Penelitian menggunakan desain pra-eksperimental dengan instrumen Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) versi modifikasi yang terdiri dari 51 item. Analisis data dilakukan dengan statistik deskriptif dan uji t-berpasangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya penurunan signifikan pada tingkat stres akademik setelah intervensi. Rata-rata skor pretest sebesar 95,57 menurun menjadi 69,14 pada posttest, dengan selisih 26,43. Hasil uji-t mendukung temuan ini dengan tingkat signifikansi (p < 0,05). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pelatihan koping religius efektif dalam membantu mahasiswa baru mengelola stres akademik. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi secara teoretis dengan memperkuat peran koping religius dalam manajemen stres, serta secara praktis dengan menawarkan model pelatihan yang dapat diterapkan di lingkungan perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Pelatihan, Penanganan Keagamaan, Stres Akademik.

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INTRODUCTION

TNA (Training Needs Analysis) is an assessment that gathers information about conditions or phenomena in the field using various methods, such as observation, interviews, and questionnaires (Cholili, 2021). The TNA conducted by researchers through interviews with several new students revealed that they indicated they were experiencing academic stress. These new students reported that they easily tired during lectures and felt excessive anxiety (overthinking) about the academic tasks they faced, causing some of them to experience complaints such as dizziness, nausea, and hair loss. In addition, the students also said they were easily provoked by emotions when faced with a large pile of assignments. New students at UIN Malang, in addition to attending regular lectures, are also required to participate in special Arabic language courses and dormitory activities, such as *Tahfidzul Qur'an* (juz 30), *Ta'lim kitab*, *Ta'lim Qur'an*, mandatory recitation of the Qur'an, and other dormitory activities. The numerous academic demands these new students face often lead to academic stress.

Stress in the academic world arises from the demands of academic activities. Complex academic stress issues for students can arise from internal and external pressures (Taufik & Ifdil, 2013). Academic stress occurs when students feel unable to meet existing academic demands. Academic stress is caused by environmental, personality, cognitive, and sociocultural factors. Biological and psychological factors also influence the emergence of academic stress (Sarafino & Smith, 2011).

Decreased academic ability can negatively impact student achievement due to increased academic stress. Furthermore, intense mental stress can lead someone to engage in negative behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, getting involved in brawls, having casual sex, and abusing illegal drugs (Ambarwati, & Pinilih, 2017). Coping strategies are needed to mitigate the impact of academic stress and prevent it from occurring. One method that can be employed is religious coping. Previous research has shown a correlation between religious coping and managing academic stress in students completing their theses (Nurhiyanti, 2024). According to other research, religious coping is positively associated with students' subjective well-being. This means that religious coping plays a crucial role in managing stress, as it can offer guidance and support to individuals (Utami, 2012).

Religious coping is an effort to overcome problems by incorporating religious elements. These elements can influence the way a person thinks and finds solutions in difficult situations and can also enhance spiritual aspects (Pargament et al., 2000). Pargament defines religious coping as dealing with problems related to faith or religious practices to avoid or mitigate the impact of negative emotions, such as stress (Kamaruzzaman, 2015). Religious coping is categorized into two types: positive religious coping and negative religious coping.

Religious coping involves understanding and managing life's stressors by strengthening one's relationship with God. This method involves prayer and worship to help individuals understand and accept their situation, enabling them to cope with and manage their problems (Pargament et al., 2000). Those with strong religious beliefs

often believe that God predetermines everything, and their actions align with the principles of that religion. Religious coping is beneficial for helping individuals overcome negative experiences and enhancing students' mental well-being, emotional comfort, self-control, social closeness, physical health, and spirituality (Pargament et al., 2000).

Extensive research has been conducted on academic stress among new students, focusing on stress-causing factors such as campus adaptation, academic demands, and personal issues. Various interventions have also been explored, such as relaxation techniques, time management, group counseling, and mindfulness approaches (Pan Y et al., 2024). However, religious approaches as a coping strategy remain relatively underexplored, particularly in the context of new students undergoing a transitional phase of academic life.

Several previous studies have emphasized general coping (problem-focused and emotion-focused coping) without specifically examining the role of religious coping in reducing academic stress (Okeke et al., 2023). In addition, most studies focused on the general population or advanced students. At the same time, first-year students have unique challenges such as social adaptation, study pressure, and longing for family, which can potentially cause higher stress levels (Adam et al., 2023). Furthermore, first-year students are in a transitional phase and are at the most significant risk, so tailored interventions for orientation/start of college are still minimal (Osman, A. & Ahmed, 2021).

In terms of methods, previous research often uses descriptive quantitative approaches or surveys, which only describe stress levels without testing the effectiveness of specific interventions. This creates a research gap regarding the need for experimental studies examining the extent to which religious coping training can effectively reduce academic stress (Christopher et al., 2023).

Therefore, the study "The Effectiveness of Religious Coping Training in Reducing Academic Stress in New Students" is here to fill this gap by examining the role of religious coping as a form of psychological intervention based on spiritual values, Targeting the population of new students who are vulnerable to academic stress and using an experimental design to prove the effectiveness of the intervention, not just descriptive. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by presenting a new perspective that religiosity is not only an aspect of belief but can also be used as a practical strategy in managing academic stress.

Based on the explanation above, this research is important because many new students face academic stress and exhibit negative behaviors such as smoking, procrastination, and dating. Religious coping is positively related to students' subjective well-being, suggesting that it plays a significant role in managing stress by providing guidance and support to individuals. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of religious coping training in reducing academic stress in new students.

METHOD

This study employed an experimental research method because the researcher was interested in observing the effect of Religious Coping training on the academic stress of new students at Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang, using a pre-experimental design (Sugiono, 2019). The experimental method used in this study employed a pre-experimental design, which did not involve a control group

but conducted a pre-posttest on a single group to determine the effects of the treatment (Sugiyono, 2012).

The stages of the Religious Coping training are:

- 1. The orientation and psychoeducation Session introduces the concept of academic stress, the relationship between religiosity and mental health, and the differences between positive and negative religious coping. The material provided includes a definition of academic stress, brief evidence on the role of religiosity, and examples of religious coping (Saunders N, 2024).
- 2. Developing Positive Religious Coping: Reappraisal and Meaning Session, which utilizes techniques for reinterpreting events within a religious framework (benign/reframing) and using verses, prayers, and rituals as sources of meaning (Okeke et al., 2023).
- 3. Session on Seeking Spiritual and Community Support. This includes seeking support from religious leaders, study groups/communities, and spiritual mentors regarding religious perspectives on issues.
- 4. Session on Directed Religious Practice and Religious Behavior Activation. This includes religious routines that support emotional stability (meditation/recitation/structured prayer, short-term rituals).
- 5. Session on Identifying and Addressing Negative Religious Coping. This includes recognizing spiritual discontent, reevaluating one's relationship with God, and employing cognitive-behavioral and theological techniques to address issues.
 - 6. Evaluation & Monitoring Session (Abulfaraj et al., 2024)

The measurement instrument used in this study is a modified version of the Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) based on the theory introduced by Gadzella, (1991). This instrument consists of 51 items that assess two aspects: sources of stress and responses to stress. The stress aspect encompasses frustration, conflict, pressure, change, and self-imposed stress. The response to stress aspects includes physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive evaluation. The study involved 28 participants.

The data analysis methods include descriptive statistical analysis and t-tests (Yusriani, 2022). The t-test was used to examine the significance of differences in the mean level of academic stress among new students before and after the treatment was implemented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Result

Statistik deskriptif Table 1

Descriptive Statistical Test Results

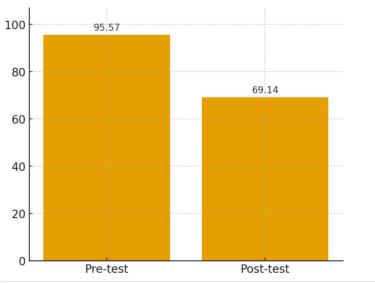
Paired Samples Statistics							
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
Pair 1	Pretest academic stress	95.57	28	21.889	4.137		
	Posttest academic stress	69.14	28	25.847	4.129		

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 31

The descriptive analysis results in Table 1 show a pretest score of 95.57 for academic stress and a posttest score of 69.14. These data indicate that new students'

academic stress levels decreased after participating in religious coping training. Therefore, it can be concluded that religious coping training significantly reduced new students' academic stress.

Figure 1
Pre-Test and Post-Test Results



Source: Excel

The results in Figure 1 show a decrease in the academic stress score of new students from 95.57 (pre-test) to 69.14 (post-test) after participating in Religious Coping training. These results confirm that religious-based training can be an effective strategy in helping new students cope with academic stress. The $\pm 27\%$ decrease indicates that religious coping skills can:

- a. Reduce the psychological burden that arises during the college adaptation process.
- b. Help students find meaning, serenity, and spiritual support when facing learning challenges.
- c. Provide alternative non-pharmacological interventions relevant to the students' cultural context and values.

This program can be integrated into new student orientation activities or campus counselling services to increase academic resilience from the beginning of college.

Hypothesis testing is crucial in this study to determine whether there are differences in the levels of academic stress experienced by new students before and after receiving religious coping training. The following table presents the t-test results, a form of hypothesis testing.

Uji t
Table 2
T-Test Results

1 TOSCITOSATOS						
	Pai	ired Sampl	es Test			
	Paired Differences				df	Sig (2-
Mea	n Std.	Std.	95% Confidence			tailed)
	Deviation	Error	Interval of the			
		Mean	Difference			
			Lower Upper			

Pair 1	Pretest academic	26.429	29.484	5.572	14.996	37.861	4.743	27	0.000
-	stress- posttest								
	academic stress								

Source: IBM SPSS Statistics 31

Based on Table 2, the data obtained with a sig. Value of 0.000 indicates that sig. <0.05. Ha is accepted because of the signature. value is <0.05. This assessment is based on the formula that if the sig. The p-value is greater than 0.05, which indicates that H0 is accepted, meaning there is no significant influence between the variables. Meanwhile, if the sig. Value is <0.05, then Ha is accepted, meaning there is an influence between the variables. Therefore, the t-test results indicate that religious coping training affects academic stress in new students.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the academic stress experienced by first-year students and evaluate the effect of religious coping training on reducing stress levels (Graça & Brandão, 2024). Data analysis concluded that first-year students' academic stress levels before the intervention were relatively high (Cilar et al., 2020). This was evident from the average pretest score of 95.57. This figure indicates that first-year students were experiencing significant academic stress at the beginning of their semester (Pienyu et al., 2024). Significant changes were observed in students' academic stress levels after the intervention of religious coping training. The average posttest score decreased to 69.14, indicating a significant stress reduction (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2020). This 26.43-point decrease indicates that religious coping training positively impacted helping students manage their academic stress. Furthermore, this finding was supported by the hypothesis test results, which showed a significance of 0.000 (p < 0.05). These data statistically indicate that religious coping training significantly reduced academic stress in new students. This suggests that using religious coping strategies is effective in helping new students manage their academic stress.

New students are in a transitional phase that is vulnerable to stress. The first cause of high stress is increased academic demands (Pascoe et al., 2020). Transitioning from school to college requires new students to master time management skills, read complex literature, and complete more challenging assignments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This academic pressure is a major predictor of stress (Córdova Olivera et al., 2023). Second, new social and environmental adaptation: Students need to adjust to the campus environment, friendships, and the demands of independent living, which can trigger feelings of isolation or homesickness (Thacker et al., 2022; Sheldon et al., 2021). Third, future uncertainty: Concerns about career prospects, academic success, and financial support contribute to exacerbating academic stress. Fourth, individual psychological vulnerability: Factors such as neurotic personality, lack of coping skills, and weak social support increase the risk of more severe stress (Farrer et al., 2024). Religious Coping Effectively Reduces Stress, where the mechanisms that make this approach effective involve first giving meaning to stressful experiences. Students can view academic pressure as part of the learning process and a meaningful life test. This increases meaning-making, which plays a role in resilience. Second, activating positive emotions: Prayer, dhikr, or other spiritual practices have been shown to create a sense of calm, gratitude, and optimism, which reduces physiological

stress responses. Third, reducing negative coping: This training helps students avoid maladaptive thought patterns such as blaming God or feeling punished, which actually worsen anxiety and depression. Fourth, increasing social and spiritual support: Religious activities often strengthen relationships with the community, so students feel less alone in facing challenges. Fifth Alternative to secular psychological interventions: For students with a religious cultural background, spirituality-based interventions are more easily accepted, so that compliance with the program is higher than other methods, such as mindfulness alone.

This finding supports previous research, which concluded a correlation between religious coping and academic stress levels in students completing their theses (Nurhiyanti, 2024). This finding is in accordance with the theory proposed by Pargament et al., (2000) regarding the significance of religious beliefs and ceremonies in coping with stress. In the context of new students at UIN Malang, religious coping strategies provide an effective mechanism for them to manage the new and potentially overwhelming academic demands at the beginning of their studies. Religion-based approaches or interventions are currently being developed to address psychological problems, as evidenced by research (Cholili, Zainuddin, et al., 2024), which, in the title "Penanganan Prokrastinasi Mahasiswa Melalui Muhasabah Diri," explains that selfreflection has an impact on self-control in students. By remembering God and being mindful of God in all situations, individuals can become more aware of God's presence and control themselves, allowing the role of religion, especially self-reflection, to provide an alternative in addressing the problems of procrastination or work postponement. Likewise, research from (Cholili et al., 2023) by the title "Pengaruh gratitude (kebersyukuran) dalam Islam terhadap psychological well-being pada mahasiswa tingkat akhir" explains that gratitude has a positive relationship with psychological well-being in final year students, which means that the higher the level of gratitude of students, the better their psychological well-being and vice versa.

Further research from (Cholili et al., 2024) by the title "The Effect of Dzikir Intensity on Self-Control in Psychology Students" also explained that the intensity of dhikr can influence students' self-control by 40.2%. The results of this study also suggest that consistent dhikr can enhance a person's self-control. Other research from (Cholili, Nurill, et al., 2024) by the title "Studi literatur: Analisis fenomena pemberian psikoterapi dzikir dalam mengurangi tingkat kecemasan remaja" also explained that dhikr is an effective method for reducing anxiety levels in adolescents. This dhikr phenomenon will help reduce anxiety levels because dhikr provides peace of mind and can reduce feelings of fear, worry, and anxiety. Apart from that, research from Cholili, Hakim, et al., (2024) by the title "Pengaruh spiritualitas terhadap psychological well-being pada mahasiswa" also explained that there is a significant relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being (PWB) in students of the Faculty of Psychology, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The analysis revealed that spirituality contributed 37.6% to the variation in PWB, with a statistically significant value. The correlation between spirituality and PWB is also positive, indicating that the higher a person's level of spirituality, the higher their psychological well-being. Furthermore, research from Zou et al., (2022) by the title "Pengaruh Spiritualitas Terhadap Career Decision Mahasiswa Akhir" explains that spirituality is one of the factors influencing career indecision in final-year students. As an individual's spirituality increases, career indecision decreases. This occurs because spirituality enables a person to gain a deeper

understanding of themselves, thereby aligning their career plans with their capabilities. Conversely, as an individual's spirituality decreases, career indecision increases.

The results of this study also provide new insights into the effectiveness of faith-based approaches in addressing psychological issues in Islamic higher education settings (Haddar et al., 2023). Although previous studies have shown mixed results regarding the relationship between religiosity and academic stress, this study provides strong empirical evidence of the benefits of a structured religious coping intervention in reducing students' academic stress levels (Dwidiyanti, 2022; Eko Sujadi, 2022). The significant reduction in stress levels following religious coping training could have broad positive implications for students' well-being and academic achievement (Meneghel et al., 2019). With lower stress levels, new students are expected to better adjust to their new academic environment, manage their study load (Khamida et al., 2019), and ultimately achieve optimal learning outcomes.

The results of the study showing a decrease in academic stress of new students through Religious Coping training emphasize the need for campus policy support that integrates a spiritual-religious approach into student welfare services such as including a religious coping training module in the new student orientation program (PKKMB) or campus counseling services (Whitehead & Bergeman, 2020), in Campus counseling services should strengthen collaboration between psychologists, academic advisors, and religious figures/spiritual figures to provide balanced assistance, both psychologically and spiritually and take a holistic approach to student mental health, including cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. From a methodological perspective, this study provides a foundation for the development of a more robust intervention program regarding the use of a long-term experimental design (longitudinal/cluster-RCT) to assess the sustainability of training effects up to 6-12 months after the intervention, conducting mediation and moderation measurements (Niemiec et al., 2020): for example, how increased positive religious coping and decreased negative religious coping mediate the reduction in academic stress (Bouwhuis-Van Keulen et al., 2023). Practically, the results of this study have several implications, including that for students, this training provides coping strategies that align with their values and beliefs, thereby helping to reduce anxiety and improve academic adaptation (Alsubaie et al., 2021). For lecturers and academic advisors: The study's results can serve as a basis for providing more personalized and contextual guidance, considering students' spiritual aspects. For campus counselors: Can develop religious-based intervention modules as a non-pharmacological alternative to reduce stress, especially for new students who experience difficulties in adapting. A decrease in academic stress by ±27% for higher education institutions indicates that a religious value-based approach is both culturally relevant and psychologically compelling. Implementing this program can support the campus's goal of improving student retention and academic well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the significant effectiveness of religious coping training in reducing academic stress for new college students. This study conducted the pretest and posttest using the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design method, which produced normally distributed data based on the Shapiro-Wilk normality test with a

significance value greater than 0.05. The descriptive statistical analysis results showed a striking decrease of 26.43, from the pretest academic stress score (95.57) to the posttest score (69.14). Hypothesis testing using the t-test confirmed a significant difference between the two scores, with a significance level <0.05. The practical implications of this study's results highlight the importance of developing intervention programs that integrate religious coping strategies to help students manage academic stress and enhance their well-being in higher education environments.

These findings confirm that religious coping strategies can be practical in helping new students overcome academic challenges at the beginning of their college years.

It is recommended that future research employ a more robust experimental design, such as using a control group to compare the effectiveness of religious coping with other stress management methods. Exploring the long-term effects of religious coping training on students' academic stress and academic achievement is also important. Future researchers could also explore factors that influence the effectiveness of religious coping in reducing academic stress, such as students' initial level of religiosity or the specific types of academic stressors they encounter. Developing and testing more specific religious coping techniques for Islamic higher education could also be a focus of future research, to enrich the body of knowledge on religion-based stress management in academic settings.

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